



Hour by Hour with Holding On



‘Hour by Hour with Holding On’ is a storytelling project from Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs that is a response to the publication of the Scottish 2021 drug-related death statistics. Each story reflects the level of complexity that comes with supporting a loved one with a drug problem. The complexity spreads across the whole family.

These stories reveal the severe and debilitating consequences that family members face through every aspect of their lives. Consequences like lack of sleep, financial issues, witnessing non-fatal overdoses, breakdown of relationships, unresolved trauma, physical and mental health worries, and a worrying load more.

Holding On is a national support service from Scottish Families that offers intensive support to families who are at a higher risk of losing someone as a result of drug use.

Story One

I'm in my 60s and my son is in his 40s. His main drugs are heroin and benzodiazepines. I have been trying to get him better for **25 years**. I split up with my husband 20 years ago and he isn't there for his son. I am a retired nurse and now my own health has suffered. I have had **two** strokes. I have high blood pressures and I often forget to eat.

I don't know the last time I had a good sleep.

My son lives with me because I don't want him to die in the street. I **isolate myself** from family and friends because **my life is consumed** by my son's drug problem and the chaos it brings every day. I sometimes wish one of us would die because at least one of us would find some peace.

In a moment of desperation after my son nearly died from an **overdose for the third time**, I took to Google to find help and came across Scottish Families. I spoke to someone on the Helpline, and they listened to me **without judgement**. It felt so good just to get everything off my chest and they really seemed to understand.

I received a text message within 48 hours to arrange a call. We arranged to talk the following day. But my son did not come home until 4am and had a **drug-induced psychotic episode**. I had to phone the police and an ambulance. He was out on the street. The neighbours could hear and see everything. By the time this ended I was feeling so **drained and emotional**. I did not feel I could go on a call to someone. I needed to get to the hospital for my son, so I cancelled my meeting. The worker was so accommodating and understanding.

We exchanged some texts and they suggested we could change our time for later in the day after I had visited my son - so I agreed. **I am so glad I made that call**. I can't remember now what was said exactly but I will always remember how I felt after it. I felt listened to and for the first time I felt lighter.

I knew I wasn't alone.

Six months later, I now attend a weekly group with other people in similar situations. I don't feel so alone, and I feel stronger. My son is **still using drugs and is not getting support** but there are less arguments. I have finally been able to set and keep my own boundaries with my son. This has allowed me to get some me-time, whatever that is. A walk with the dog or a coffee with my sister.

To other people this may seem like a tiny step, but for me I would make up **excuse after excuse** because I was just drowning in my son's world of drugs. I turn my phone off at a reasonable time at night now. Before I kept it on as I was **waiting for a call to say my son is dead**. I now sleep a good bit better than before, and I make sure I eat.

I have been able to get my nails done and buy myself some new clothes for the first time in years because I **no longer give my son every penny I have**. I am a mum, and he is my first born and I **will always love and care for my son**. I will feel this responsibility over him no matter his age, but through working with Scottish Families I realise I can't fix him.

I **deserve some happiness** and I have learned when to say no to my son's constant demands. I have **let go of some of the guilt** I carried that was mine to take on. I can't thank Scottish Families enough for giving me some life back and some self-worth. I know moving forward I will be okay as I am **no longer alone** on this journey.

Story Two

My youngest son who is in his 20s has a problem with heroin, Valium, cannabis, and sometimes alcohol. I don't sleep. I don't eat. **I live and breathe my son's problem** and the impact this has is so horrendous. **It affects my whole family.** My relationship with my husband is at breaking point. I am **off on long-term sick** due to feeling like my head is going to explode most days. I never think my son is going to make it through the weekend.

I think he's going to **kill himself** or he is going to **die of an overdose.** I have **paid so much money for him** due to threats from people. I have taken out loans. **I have no money.** I have witnessed so many violent situations with knives, suicide attempts, drug dealers at my door. **It's complete chaos every day of my life.**

A community link worker referred me to a service and to be honest, I didn't have much hope. I wondered why because it's my son that needs help, not me. I received a text message in amongst many texts and calls from my son begging me for money that I almost missed it. **I had no faith in any services.** I didn't see anyone being able to help me with my current situation, so I didn't even reply.

A few days later I received another text checking in and asking if I would like a call. It also said they could be flexible with times for me. I decided I had nothing to lose and just replied as I had 5 minutes free. They replied right away, and we arranged a call for that evening. However, I had to miss my call because my son came in and was **shouting for money.** I just couldn't cope, and **he was threatening suicide again.** I just took myself to bed and turned my phone off.

In the morning I seen the worker had text me again. They said they had a free space that day and the next, so I arranged a time because I was embarrassed about cancelling the night before. I didn't really feel a call was going to do much for me. I didn't have any expectations. But on the call, I felt **the worker respected my feelings.** They said my guilt, anger, resentment...everything was valid.

The worker told me about what support they could offer but also that they had a group with people who are in similar situations. They also said everything was flexible and I could pick and choose what support I wanted and what it looked like. I **felt relief that there was no pressure** because like the other day...sometimes I can't even bring myself to speak.

We decided to be flexible with calls, but I would try to commit to one per week and I would have a think about attending one of the online groups. **Six months later I am now back at my work** working the same hours as before. I went through counselling alongside my support from Scottish Families to help me through the trauma I experienced.

I now have accepted **it was trauma** and I don't minimise the things I have been through or say that others are worse off. I have attended the Holding On group and **now I don't feel alone.** I use the group when I can. It's nice just to be around others who understand my situation.

I make sure every day I give myself some me time.

There is less conflict between me and my son. **There is less abuse.** I am naloxone trained and I am confident to use it.

If and when my son wants recovery, **I am in a better place** to support him with that.

Story Three

Addiction does not only affect the addict; it also significantly **affects everyone in their family**. It created an enabler in me and causes conflict between family members because the addicted family member will go to great lengths to protect their access to the enabler.

When our son decided he was ready to recover last year after previous failed attempts, we were so happy and wanted to do everything we could to support him with this. The first obstacle for him was **trying to obtain an appointment** to commence a prescription. The waiting time was 9 weeks. If he had been started on an opioid substitute immediately or within a few days, we feel that this would have encouraged him with his recovery. He was eventually commenced on methadone, 40mls, and after being on this dose for some time, the prescriber advised him that he should increase his dose because 40mls was not obtaining him.

He declined because he thought the maximum dose for admission to rehab was 40mls. We have since discovered that the rehab would have detoxed him from up to 80mls. This ultimately contributed to him using illicit drugs to top up his methadone as his dose was not high enough, therefore putting him at a **higher risk of overdose**.

Our son's experience of attending the pharmacy daily to have his methadone administered was not good. He knew that other pharmacy customers were aware of his reason for waiting to go into the separate room and **felt ashamed** of this and often felt pharmacists and their staff judgemental. Applying for rehab proved to be frustrating. Thankfully after some months of getting nowhere, we approached Faces and Voices of Recovery UK and they kindly offered to advocate for our son.

This was a godsend and turning point as it **alleviated some of the pressure** on our family as we knew the advocate was doing everything in his power to help our son secure rehab. And most importantly, **our son had confidence** and **complete trust** in him. We were delighted when our son finally got a date to go into rehab and the hope this gave us was enormous.

It was at this point that I decided to contact Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs because I knew my enabling was having an adverse effect on our whole family, but I couldn't stop doing it and **desperately wanted to change** because I thought I was a stumbling block in our son's recovery.

Maureen on the Helpline gave me some immediate advice and directed me to Naloxone training and arranged for Sarah to call me for ongoing support and CRAFT training. This has had a huge impact on how I interact with our son.

Unfortunately, our son decided to leave rehab after 4 weeks and I can't begin to explain how **disappointed and hopeless** I felt at this point. However, he appears to be very positive now and has a **supportive social worker** who arranged for him to continue his detox in the community, and he seems to be doing well.

Addiction is a horrendous illness and I have now accepted that **I can't control what he does**, and we are trying to live our lives alongside our son's addiction and try to be supportive but not enabling, which can be difficult, but with the support of others, it is possible.



Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol and Drugs is a national charity which supports anyone concerned about someone else's alcohol or drug use in Scotland. We give information and listening support to many people and help them with confidence, communication, general wellbeing, and we link them into local support. We also help people recognise and understand the importance of looking after themselves.

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Registered Scottish charity: SC034737